

# **The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards 2005**

## **Alaska**

### **State Honorees**

**Brittany Heck**, 17, of Wasilla, Alaska, a senior at Palmer High School in Palmer, organized several community drives to sign up Alaska Natives and other minorities for the National Marrow Donor Registry, to increase the possibility that individuals in those population groups will be able to get life-saving bone marrow transplants when needed. Brittany realized the urgent need for minority bone marrow matches when she read on the Internet that baseball Hall-of-Famer Rod Carew's daughter had died because her ethnic background (Panamanian-Hebrew) made it impossible to find a donor match.

Brittany, who grew up in an Athabascan Indian village, then learned that there were fewer than 200 Alaska Natives on the national donor registry. "If no one in Alaska takes up the cause, how will the number of Alaska Natives on the marrow registry increase?" she asked. Brittany worked with the Job Corps, Anchorage Blood Bank, and the local VFW chapter and Lions Club on four registration drives, planning the logistics, making promotional fliers and posters, raising money, and contacting potential donors. The result: a 17% increase in Alaska Natives on the National Marrow Donor Registry. "If my drives impact and save only one life and bring hope to only one family, I will be perfectly satisfied that my efforts were worthwhile," said Brittany.

**Kevin Priestley**, 14, of Palmer, Alaska, an eighth-grader at Palmer Junior Middle School, volunteered to work with special-needs students as a teacher's aide during summer school last year. Kevin, whose parents are both involved in special education, knew that funding for this part of his school district's curriculum was being cut, and felt compelled to help. "I felt that I should help the teachers and staff who are stretched thin," he said.

As a teacher's aide, Kevin helped teach math, reading, science, penmanship and cooking to children with autism, Down's Syndrome and learning disabilities. He also monitored them on the playground, and helped with whatever else needed to be done. In addition, Kevin worked with pre-schoolers who had disabilities, teaching them to write their names and supervising them during swimming sessions. All of this, said Kevin, required a great deal of both patience and energy. But it was worth it, he said, especially "whenever one of the students I was working with grasped and understood something I taught them."

### **Distinguished Finalists**

**Katelyn Baldwin**, 17, of Wasilla, Alaska, a senior at Colony High School in Palmer, organized "Africa Night," a benefit that raised more than \$1,500 to support female refugees in Rwanda through the nonprofit organization Women for Women International. Katelyn came up with the idea, coordinated and hosted the event, secured business donations, and recruited volunteers.

**Jonathan Weindel**, 17, of Anchorage, Alaska, a senior at A.J. Dimond High School, is the founder and director of the Child Enrichment Mentoring Program, which he started in January 2004. His after-school mentoring program offers hands-on science activities to 15 middle level students to increase their interest and ability in both science and math.